

Principles of Successful Public Communications

When sharing your organization's story, it is important to do so in a way that inspires your audience both intellectually and emotionally. Ideally, you want to move people past simply appreciating your mission and work to a place where their concern for your issue, or interest in your opportunity, motivates them to take action on behalf of your organization.

Also, a good communicator serves as a 'go between' – an interpreter or translator of the more technical information of any complex project or issue. This allows your messaging and storytelling to be accessible to a diversity of important audiences: members and donors, media, opinion leaders and elected officials, project collaborators and partners, and the public. Therefore, when communicating with the public, it is critical for your staff to shift its frame of reference away from that of a technician amongst professional colleagues, to instead telling stories to the equivalent of their family and friends.

To meet these two objectives, we encourage your organization to adopt four principles of public communications:

- 1) make your language work for the layperson;
- 2) reach people's hearts as much as their heads (again, intellectually *and* emotionally);
- 3) a picture or image tells a thousand words, videos even more so;
- 4) provide media outlets with easily usable information so they can quickly and conveniently incorporate it into their work.

Meanwhile, to be most successful in your communications efforts, we encourage you to pursue these four organizational objectives:

- 1) use a consistent story - the top tier messages that constitute your organization's brand - throughout your organization's communications;
- 2) infuse communications opportunities into program and fundraising plans and activities;
- 3) develop a suite of story lines and styles to share with your public (human interest, policy, cultural, science, etc.);
- 4) enlist many messengers to tell your story, including supporters, beneficiaries and other non-staff to whom that specific audience can relate.

Finally, one of our early mentors offered some sage advice: build your organization such that if someone from another organization, the media, an agency or university, a funder, a decision-maker, or the general public is looking for an expert in that field, your organization will be thought of as one of the top three experts to go to. This is a highly effective brand-building objective and strategy that has served us well for more than two decades.